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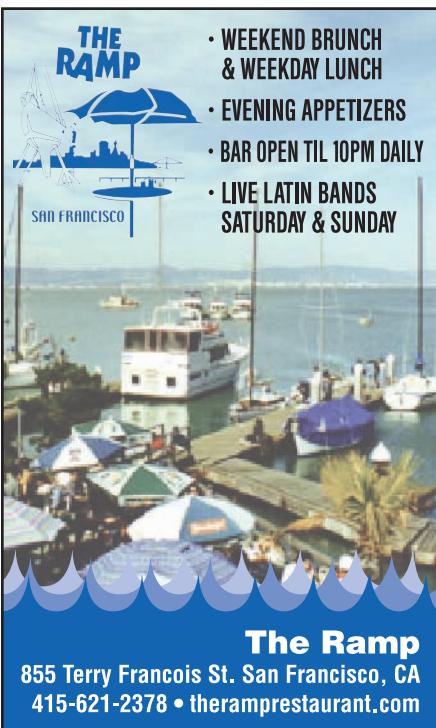


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FEAST

DEAR FRIENDS,

Spring = sprung. After editing this issue of Feast, the Guardian's bi-yearly food supplement, I'll be happy for the better weather — I've got some dining out to do. BBQ joints, tapas treats, and flavorful vegan-gluten-free plates? That'll be me waving at you from the next table over.

Happy eating, Caitlin

EDITOR
CAITLIN DONOHUE

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MIRISSA NEFF

ON THE COVER
Tapas from LaLoLa (see page 14).

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LEFT PHOTO BY VIRGINIA MILLER, RIGHT PHOTO BY LARA HATA

THE HUNT FOR AUTHENTIC BAY BBQ

BY VIRGINIA MILLER

virginia@sfbg.com

For a child of East, West, and Middle America, I have an unexpected and profound affinity for the music and food of the South. Traveling in the region, my love grows. Florida conch and stone crab, Tex-Mex, and Texas brisket. But when I dream of the South, I think Deep South. Start talking Low Country and Gullah cuisine, or Cajun and Creole cooking, and I become brutally homesick for a home I never had.

Then there is the barbecue. And by barbecue, I mean pulled pork, those words being synonymous in the Deep South. Texas brisket? Naturally. Memphis ribs? Hell yeah. But pulled pork, that tender, shredded, fatty mound of piggy goodness, for me, is the pinnacle of BBQ. Don't even get me started on sauces. South Carolina mustard or thick, sweet Kansas City sauce? I'll take it all, thank you. A proper sauce turns impeccable meat into ecstasy.

One of the more memorable journeys the Renaissance Man and I ever took was a two-week road trip through four Southern states for BBQ, music, and food. Though I've been a California girl for the larger part of my life, in this glorious state of endless riches I rarely find barbecue comparable to that of my Southern exploits — even coming from those who claim to be Southern natives. There are whispers of true BBQ here, but often

something indefinable is lacking. The problem commonly lies in sauces, smoking techniques and woods used, or the meat's tenderness (I'm sorry: it ain't real BBQ if it's not fatty). Even delicious 'que is missing a certain raw, gut-level sense of place outside the South.

Regardless, some worthy Bay Area spots have emerged to satisfy 'que cravings. Uncle Frank's was the best BBQ I've had in California, until it tragically closed last fall. Frank's brisket was thick with fat, served in the back of a dodgy dive bar in suburban, staid Mountain View.

Bo's Barbecue (3422 Mount Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette, (925) 283-7133, www.bosbarbecue-catering.com) specializes in solid brisket. Golden Gate Park golf course houses an unexpected gem, Ironwood BBQ (around 47th Ave., SF. (415) 751-8987, www.ironwood-bbq.com) which is strong on pulled pork. Years ago, Brother-in-Law's BBQ morphed to Lilly's and became Da Pitt (705 Divisadero, SF. (415) 440-7427, www.dapitt-bbq.com). Though past its glory days, it's still a worthy detour, wafting glorious smoke aromas down the street. What of ever-popular Memphis Minnie's (576 Haight, SF. (415) 864-7675, www.memphisminnies.com)? I must admit that despite a love for their rowdy Southern tunes and spirit, I can't get behind the lackluster meats and watery sauces.

We go through waves of 'que openings and we're in the midst of another now. Here are five recent BBQ openings.

SNEAKY'S BBQ

From Wednesday to Sunday, this pop-up kitchen in Rebel steps outside tradition with items like Kurobuta pork belly. But more than any of the other newer 'que joints on this list, it gets Carolina-style pulled pork right — Sneaky's is among the best in town. Only downside is the price — a single platter of meat and two sides is \$17, a two meat combo \$26, compared to \$12 and \$18 for the same options at CatHead's BBQ.

Sauces: Vinegar BBQ, spicy jalapeno-habanero, South Carolina mustard, Rooster (a creamy version of spicy sauce)

Stand-outs: Aforementioned pulled pork is tops here, as is South Carolina mustard sauce (and they're perfection together). Sneaky's brings it with Creekstone Farms brisket and baby-back ribs. The outfit is to be commended for using all natural, hormone-free meats, smoked with locally-cut almond wood. Sides (\$4) include a classic coleslaw, and fresh — not soggy or overcooked — collard greens. Cheeky points for Rebel's fancified gay biker bar setting, and the majestic motorcycle that serves as the room's centerpiece.

1760 Market, SF. (415) 431-4200, sneakysbbq.blogspot.com

CATHEAD'S BBQ

Nate's BBQ had quite a following — not to mention coveted home delivery. It recently morphed into CatHead's BBQ under the direction of Tennessee native Richard Park and Pamela Schafer, and has become one of the city's best BBQ options. Thankfully, it still offers delivery. Vegetarians get a nod with cornmeal-crusted BBQ tofu. Mains are wonderfully priced at \$7 with a mini-biscuit and pickles, while a platter with two sides is \$12. Of note: large biscuits are aptly described as having the size of a cat's head

Sauces: Mustard, ketchup-based BBQ sauce, North Carolina finishing sauce, habanero, CatHead's catsup, pepper vinegar

Stand-outs: They had me with Coca Cola-smoked brisket. A subtle sweetness permeates the über-smoky beef. Ribs are also strong, the best of any place listed. The secret is extra fat, rendering the meat fall-apart tender. All sides (\$4 each) are vegetarian, including mustard or spicy habanero slaw. Collard greens taste healthy, a fresh change of pace from traditional collards. Though I miss the ham hocks.

1665 Folsom, SF. (415) 861-4242, [www.catheadsbbq.com](http://catheadsbbq.com)

B SIDE BBQ

Tanya Holland of West Oakland's beloved Brown Sugar Kitchen opened B Side Barbeque a few months ago, a hip, comfortable space lined with photos of African American cowboys. Look closely through the smoky, rich air and you'll see Tanya and her husband in one of the old-timey shots on the walls.

Sauces: Hot vinegar, Carolina mustard, or traditional

Stand-outs: Pulled pork is tender and lush in Carolina mustard sauce, but they shine with smoked brown sugar-rubbed brisket (\$9 half order; \$16 full order). Fatty beef sings with sugary crust. Ribs are succulent. A side of fresh, spicy coleslaw (\$4), light on the mayo, is a happy companion. Food is prepared with care, a step above many East Bay 'que joints.

3303 San Pablo, Oakl. (510) 595-0227, [www.bsidebbq.com](http://bsidebbq.com)

CEDAR HILL

The Marina has itself a BBQ restaurant. Small, welcoming, and lined with rustic artwork and paraphernalia from Texas to the Carolinas, Cedar Hill is a big win for the neighborhood to the north. The 'que is not as soul-satisfying as it is in the South, but has plenty to offer with dishes like Cajun

shrimp on Anson Mills grits topped with andouille sausage and piquillo peppers (\$17), or sweet tea-fried chicken (\$7.50 — \$19 for a quarter to whole chicken).

Sauces: Texas red, KC BBQ, South Carolina mustard, North Carolina vinegar

Stand-outs: Tender smoked pork (\$4.50-16) wins out over Texas beef brisket (\$4.50-16), while Memphis baby back ribs (\$5-25) are a little dry. Worthy sides (\$3.50 — \$11.50, portion to quart) include a fresh, bright coleslaw, or pit beans glorified with burnt tips. Ruth's buttermilk pie (\$5) with graham cracker crust is a creamy delight. Extra points: Cedar Hill serves bottles of North Carolina's classic wild cherry soda, Cheerwine.

3242 Scott, SF. (415) 934-5403, www.cedarchillsf.com

SOUTHPAW BBQ

Southpaw BBQ has the most welcoming, festive atmosphere of any of the new 'que joints, with beer brewed right in the dining room, additional beers on draft (like Bruery Mischief, Brother Thelonious, and Deschutes Green Lakes), and a playful cocktail menu offering sazeracs made with Germain-Robin craft brandy and tea syrup.

Sauces: Alabama white sauce, Eastern North Carolina, South Carolina mustard, sweet potato habanero, sweet chili vinegar, Memphis

Stand-outs: Slightly smoky Honey Bunny cocktail (blanco tequila, red pepper, orange and carrot juice, agave) is lively and fun. Platters (\$14-19) come with cornbread and two sides. As much as I wanted to love the ribs, brisket and pulled pork, they bordered on being either dry or not as flavorful as other 'que joints. Though not barbecue, fresh, flaky catfish (\$14) from Louisiana is my favorite here: comfortingly fried and not at all fishy.

2170 Mission, SF. (415) 934-9300, www.southpawbbqs.com



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SECRET GARDEN TEA HOUSE

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY CAITLIN DONOHUE



7 PRETTY TEA PARTIES

Unbeknownst to those whose primary haunt is dingy dive bars and the bottom of a margarita glass, there are as many kinds of tea houses in San Francisco as one-night stands.

There are the fussy Anglo types: all frill, pastel snack-treats, and delicate china. The hippie tea shacks, where you can order "half of an avocado" without going off the menu. There are borscht-and-herring Russian places, like Katia's in the Richmond (600 Fifth Ave., SF. (415) 668-9292, www.katias.com). Of course, the real-deal knowledgeable Chinatown shops with blends to spare and free tastings like Red Blossom Tea Company (831 Grant, SF. (415) 395-0868, www.redblossomtea.com).

But none will leave you with a hangover, or linger awkwardly as you get ready for work — and most provide a slow-paced, table service perfect for making sober-eyes at the hottie you may be lugging home afterwards. (Caitlin Donohue)

OM SHAN TEA

This cozy Mission room may just have the healthiest meal options in the neighborhood — salads to à la carte health food and the aforementioned avo half. If you come on Mondays from 7 to 10pm you'll find yourself in the womb of Open Heart Poetry night, a soul-searching open mic with featured poets that draws a packed house (there's also weekly temple dancer and live music evenings). Like the other shops on in this roundup, the menu of teas here can be a little intimidating to a newbie, but in this hand-holding environment an ask for guidance to your server will go a long way.

233 14th St., SF. (415) 747-8327, www.omshantea.com

LOVEJOY'S

Nuzzled into the bosom of Noe Valley, Lovejoy's can at first be overwhelming — my god, the doilies! Just embrace the chintz, you'll be glad you did. This is the most perfect pinky-up spot in town, and it stocks the traditional menu of sweets and scones in addition to heartier fare like shepard's pies and the Ploughman's Lunch — a platter of artichoke hummus, fruit, greens, and vinegar crisps. Suggestion: go for afternoon tea and order the tallest multi-tier tray of petit fours you can manage. And don't mind the flocks of MILFs.

1351 Church, SF. (415) 648-5895, www.lovejoystearoom.com

TASTE

Had a rough weekend? Taste awaits to aide in your detoxification and mental clarification. A serene spot in Hayes Valley where one orders at the counter, Taste prides itself on serving tea the traditional Chinese way. That means a tableside les-

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son on how to drink your brew, pouring out the first cup onto the slotted platform provided before decanting and then tipping the hot liquid into your teeny-tiny cup. Side dishes to all the Zen-like ceremony include dim sum-style buns filled with red bean paste and vegetable curry. Like many tea rooms, you're also welcome to buy your favorite blend to take home.

535 Octavia, SF. (415) 552-5668, www.tasteteas.com

TAI Y TARA

It is testament to the misty wonder of the Richmond District that such a place as Tai Y Tara is not overrun with fashionistas seeking authentic British ridingwear and a picturesque place to Instagram themselves drinking a cup of PG Tips. Actually a clothing store hawking everything from longer-in-the-back pastel polo shirts to horse bridles, the back of Tai Y Tara houses a handful of tables with polo-patterned coverings. Snack on a Picadilly (a toasted crumpet with a slice of tomato and Dubliner cheese) while you sip your cuppa and stare at the vintage show pony photos on the walls.

6430 California, SF. (415) 751-9275, www.talytara.com

SECRET GARDEN TEA HOUSE

There are so many bric-a-brac shelves in Secret Garden that some of them are brac-less: they exist only to be shelves. Such is the décor reasoning at this parkside parlor, where pastel-colored church hats hang from the walls for insta in-house cred. Upon my visit to Secret Garden I sipped lemon chiffon tea and consumed the Sweet Surrender plate: an ungodly amount of lady fingers, French macaroons, petit fours, and powdered sugar-dusted fruit slices. I also heard the next table over in raptures over glimpsing the royal family on a recent London vacation. Bring your grandma, or a small royal-watcher: there is an ample kid's menu here.

721 Lincoln, SF. (415) 702-0398, www.secretgardenteahouse.com

DARTEALING

You will undoubtedly be distracted by the fetching jars of pink malt balls and rooster-decorated Sriracha truffles that greet you upon entry into this hideout from the bustling tech world of SoMa. But push on past the retail space: rewards await in the form of comfy sofas be-pillowed with intricately embroidered soft things. Once settled in the space, choose a tea service (blends include cheekily named flavors like "Cabana Boy," with a sweet tropical fruit taste) that includes options from the sandwich menu: Darteaing has a vast array of crustless wonders, the tofu-and-citrus-ginger-soy glazed option being a favorite. Just make sure you leave room for dessert — the lavender-dusted scones that arrive with a ramekin of clotted cream are the dreamiest.

470 Third St., SF. (415) 644-0142, www.dartealing.com

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HARRY DENTON'S STARLIGHT ROOM

GUARDIAN PHOTO
BY VIRGINIA MILLER



3 SPRING COCKTAIL TRENDS

Spring imparts new life and lush green after winter rains. It also ushers in a glut of new cocktail menus, emphasizing the best produce of the season and exciting new trends. (Virginia Miller)

BOTTLED COCKTAILS

These are sprouting up everywhere, including at the newest addition to the Bourbon & Branch family, the 1950s-styled Local Edition (691 Market, SF, www.localizeditions.com), which opened April 12. There is no carbonation in these blends, just sophisticated, straightforward bottlings that utilize house syrups to drive flavor profile. Instead of individual-sized bottles, bar manager Ian Scalzo opts for 750-milliliter bottles that he corks and seals in-house. Order a large bottle of rum infused with house made yerba maté syrup — some come with a shot of sparkling wine, or soda — or avail yourself to tableside decanter service as you enjoy live music in this spacious, underground bar.

At Harry Denton's Starlight Room (450 Powell, SF, (415) 395-8595, www.harrydenton.com) bar manager Joel Teitelbaum created a carbonated line-up at \$12 per bottle, with even more in the works. Clear spirits dominate this bottled cocktail menu, which just launched April 10, but don't be surprised if brown liqueur shows up too. Teitelbaum is already working on a Bulleit Rye cocktail for bottling. Try a carbonated Negroni made lively with Campari, Plymouth gin, and sweet vermouth, or a Phizzed Phosphate daiquiri of white rum perked up with cane sugar, phosphate, citric acid, and distilled lime juice.

You read that right, distilled juice. Citrus can easily turn bitter and pungent during distillation, but with lots of experimentation (and failed batches) using various juices, Teitelbaum has cornered a subtle lime aroma that blends seamlessly into his bottled daiquiri, mojito, and Brokers gin-based gin and tonic — my favorite of the bunch. His homemade tonic is a light brown, a natural result from leaving in the cinchona bark filtered out of most tonics. The drink gives off a floral, cardamom aroma, and the distilled lime juice tastes here of kaffir lime. Cutting-edge bars like The Aviary in Chicago are also experimenting with high concept bottled cocktails, but Teitelbaum is going for approachable, crowd-pleasing classics — with a twist.

PIMM'S CUP REVIVAL

Pimm's Cups are on the rise. For those unfamiliar, the English brand Pimm's has a full lineup of spirits, but its most popular Pimm's No. 1 is a gin-based, rosy red liqueur with notes of citrus and spice. In addition to Pimm's, the famous cocktail made from the spirit can include lemon and cucumber, even gin, ginger ale, 7-Up, soda water, or mint. It's a boozy cucumber lemonade for grown-ups that typically comes generously garnished — a drink that is as visually pleasing as it is to taste.

Pimm's Cups are staples in London, even offered as a morning imbibement at farmers markets. In New Orleans, the drink is a tradition at 1700s bar Napoleon House (even if the version served is less than exemplary), a welcome treat in muggy Nola heat.

I wouldn't mind seeing more Pimm's traditions in our own city, but it seems we're on our way. I've long gotten my Pimm's Cup fix at 15 Romolo (15 Romolo, SF, (415) 398-1359, www.15romolo.com), which makes a lovely version with your choice of liquor ("anything but scotch," reads the menu), plus Pimm's, cucumber, mint, lemon, house ginger syrup, bitters, and soda water. Get the from-scratch treatment at Heaven's Dog (1148 Mission, SF, (415) 863-6008, www.heavensdog.com) next month when new bar manager Trevor Easter makes a fresh batch of gin-based, housemade Pimm's liqueur from bar director Erik Adkins' recipe. With this base, the two craft a gorgeous drink, lively with cucumber and lemon.

Jasper's Corner Tap (401 Taylor, SF, (415) 775-7979, www.jasperscornertap.com) bar manager Kevin Diedrich just started bottling his own Pimm's Cup. A vivid orange, it goes down bright and bold with cucumber, ginger, lemon, Pimm's, soda, and the no-longer-secret ingredient: a hint of fresh strawberry. Diedrich's little bottled beauties border on addictive. I wish I could stock them at home.

WINE COCKTAILS

Sampling through spring menus I've noticed this old trend getting fresh life. At Wo Hing (584 Valencia, SF, (415) 552-2510, www.wohinggeneralstore.com), bar manager Brooke Arthur's new spring cocktails include a Cynar spritzer made from the Italian artichoke liqueur and Plymouth Gin, alongside Punt e Mes vermouth, cava, orange bitters, lemon peel, and a pinch of salt. This dark, earthy, red refresher is blissfully bitter, bright, and invigorating. The salt enhances flavors, the bubbles impart texture.

Kevin Diedrich at Jasper's Corner Tap created a St. Helena fizz served tall in a Collins glass. This wine-based cocktail is blessedly light on the alcohol — perfect for a mid-day imbibing. It uses Newton Chardonnay, St. Germain elderflower, Benedictine, Peychaud's bitters, Bitter Truth grapefruit bitters, and soda. It's like a mini-escape to wine country.

Kate Bolton of Maven (598 Haight, SF, (415) 829-7982, www.maven-sf.com) created a unique wine aperitif in Global Warming. Dry riesling features, but also sake, even a splash of Ransom's Old Tom gin. Tart with lemon, a little scoop of absinthe sorbet permeates the drink as it melts. Who says vino and hard alcohol don't mix?



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7 VEGAN AND GLUTEN-FREE INDULGENCES

True, at first glance a vegan and gluten-free lifestyle sounds like a joke from *Portlandia's* Allergy Pride Parade. Wave those flags high, besmirched friends. But here's a non-snarky thought: for some people, it's just life. They have actual allergies to gluten and/or dairy.

Or, there are those who simply eat delectable vegan meals for personal reasons and have best friends, family, or partners with high risks of Celiac disease. Either way, any way, whatever way, with all the delicious, forward-thinking offerings in the Bay Area, it ain't so bad. In fact, it's really, really good. Don't hate, just taste. (Emily Savage)

QUESADILLAS DE CALABAZA AT GRACIAS MADRE

This quesadilla is the antithesis of the greasy pocket you're used to. It's a folded upright pillow, weighted lightly in the base with mouth-watering folds of whipped butternut squash and caramelized onions. While the presentation — which reimagines the quesadilla with a classic samosa shape — is worth it alone, the dish comes slathered in Gracias Madre's signature spicy cashew cheese and a nutty pumpkin seed salsa. It defies logic, and sets gentle fire to the tongue.

2211 Mission, SF (415) 683-1346, www.gracias-madre.com

FRESH SPINACH LEAVES APPETIZER AT ANGKOR BOREI

When you listen close enough, people in bars are having conversations about food all over San Francisco. Angkor Borei Cambodian Cuisine is a word of mouth restaurant, passed from vegan to vegan, bar patron to bar patron. While there are other yummy choices here (try the pumpkin curry with tofu, served in half a pumpkin piece), perhaps the most surprising, most exemplary idea of what you can do without wheat and dairy, is the deceptively simple vegetarian fresh spinach leaves app. It's circle of little glass bowls, each with one ingredient: ginger cubes, peanuts, coconut, lime wedges, and the titular fresh spinach leaves. Scoop up a leaf, pile on the accoutrement with tiny spoons then spread the dipping sauce atop; the combined pop of zesty flavor is a delicious experiment.

3471 Mission, SF (415) 550-8417, www.cambodiankitchen.com

VEGAN CHARCUTERIE AT GATHER

It's an elegant, inspired dish, there's no debate. Loved by both vegans and omnivores alike. It won Best of the Bay in 2010, made Food & Wine's 10 Best Dishes of 2010, and earned countless, breathless reviews on local and visiting vegan blogs. But it also should be noted that the vegan charcuterie at Gather — a sturdy board dotted with the most imaginative vegan offerings imaginable, from smoky watermelon to unrecognizable trios of mushrooms — is also gluten-free (save for the hunk of unnecessary Acme bread on the side). Dip your fork tenderly into the offerings, for each is a piece of tasty art.

2200 Oxford, Berk. (510) 809-0400, www.gatherrestaurant.com

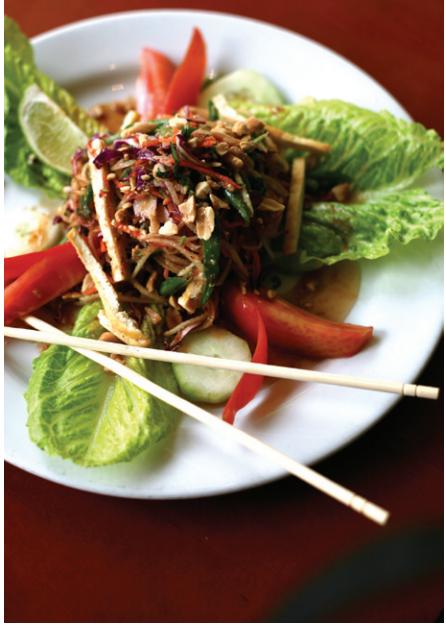
PISTACHIO AND CORNMEAL-CRUSTED TEMPEH QUINOA AT THE PLANT CAFE

This tempeh provides a mouthful of dancing flavors. The large pistachio and cornmeal-crusted triangles meet rich, fluffy quinoa covered in a spicy cucumber sauce. Pow. The zing. The Plant is another spot that has many delicious vegan options, and some wheat-free choices, but this is one of few meals that encompass both. Make sure to check the menu — true to its cause, the Plant's dishes are seasonal, though the crusted tempeh itself seems to be a frequent option (previous incarnations have come dressed up with pumpkin seeds and served over coconut mashed yams).

Pier 3, Ste 103, SF (415) 984-1973, www.theplantcafe.com

GREEN PAPAYA SALAD AT HERBIVORE

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY MIRISSA NEFF



GREEN PAPAYA SALAD AT HERBIVORE

Let's get to the most salient question: yes, this salad is big enough to fill you up on its own. Its tangy shreds cover the whole plate and rises in a crunchy mound in the center. Next, let's discuss the unfairness of most green papaya salad itself: yes, the Thai custom is to make dish with dried shrimp, and we're not trying to change tradition here, however, it's a shame such a tantalizing dish isn't more often served vegan, when it's just one ingredient that offends. Herbivore's version has crispy shreds of tomato, green beans, red cabbage, carrots, onions, tofu, peanut, and mint, all with a spot-on ginger-tamarind dressing. No shrimp needed.

531 Divisadero, SF (415) 885-7133, www.herbivorerestaurant.com

FRIED OKRA AT SOULEY VEGAN

Just thinking about these tiny fried balls of perfection makes me long for a warm afternoon perched on the outdoor benches next door at Beer Revolution, chomping okra and scarfing vegan mashed potatoes. Everything at Souley Vegan is rich and delicious. But there's something about that spicy fried okra that makes the meal super-special. Twist the lemon slice offered atop, pop one in, then share among friends on the benches. Or keep them all to yourself. No one will judge you.

301 Broadway, Oakl. (510) 922-1615, www.souleyvegan.com

SAHA SAMPLER AT SAHA

Saha has the goods: creamy hummus, smokey baba ganoush perfection, fire-roasted eggplant and tomato spread, and a colorful mix of Mediterranean olives. All of these come in one dish, naturally, the Saha sampler. The cherry on the sampler is the offering of gluten-free pita wedges, every bit as hearty as the kind with wheat, and just as perfect for scooping all that good Middle East-inspired spread.

1075 Sutter, SF (415) 345-9547, www.sahasf.com

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4 SPANISH TREATS

A year ago, Hunky Beau and I were tooling wantonly around the Iberian peninsula, from San Sebastián and Vitoria-Gasteiz in the Basque north to Sevilla and Tarifa in the Andalucian south, leaving a trail of licked little plates in our wake. We dove into exquisitely stacked two-bite prawn pintxos in Bilbao, leafy salads piled high with tiny, transparent angulas (eels) in Barcelona, rabbit paella in Valencia ...

Claro, you don't need me wagging my delectable Spanish gustation in your face. So let me offer you instead a quartet of recos in SF. There's been a diverse boom of Spanish spots lately, from gypsy-flavored Gitane to meaty Basque outpost Txoko — both raved about in recent Guardian reviews. Here are four perhaps lesser-known Spanish gems that have tugged at my tongue. (Marke B.)

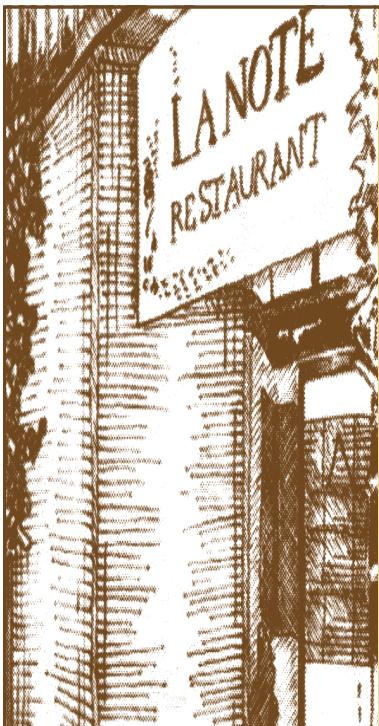
BOCADILLOS

Don't let the sandwich-y name fool you, this well-appointed Financial District spot is on the classier end. Absolutely lovely tuna-ventresca salad with miso-lemon vinaigrette and grilled prawns a la plancha provide flavor thrills; the palatial Scientology HQ across the street takes care of the people-watching. Another glass of rich, plummy Arretxoa Irouleguy, please. Be warned: Bubble Lounge next door sometimes uncorks a wave of the over-giggly into Bocadillo's loud space.

710 Montgomery, SF. (415) 982-2622, www.bocasf.com

CANELA

The Castro has suffered its lion's share of culinary misfortune of late, so how awesome is it that there's suddenly a



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tasty, homestyle Spanish joint in that legendary foodie-uninspiring hood? "Bring joy" is the motto: amazing coca flatbreads with farmer's cheese; hearty, tomato-y albondigas (meatballs) and lamb guisado (stew), and a super-friendly atmosphere make it happen. Bacalao (salt cod) salad with orange, spicy gambas (shrimp) and a tangy chilled gazpacho soup will get me through the summer, I'm guessing.

2272 Market, SF. (415) 552-3000, www.canelasf.com

LALOLA

In my opinion the most authentic bar-style Spanish tapas experience I've found in SF — albeit without my cherished vermouth, but with plenty of wine choices to suffice. (Full disclosure: one of the owners has become my real estate agent.) Sidle up to the no-reservation bar or grab a table in the bright, window-laden space with almost-secret flamenco performance room below, and order some perfectly familiar boquerones (anchovies in vinegar), espinacas (spinach sautéed with pine nuts and raisins), croquetas (bechamel croquettes) or that famous heavy Madrid bar-snack mainstay, patatas bravas — potatoes topped with zesty romanesco sauce.

1358 Mason, SF. (415) 981-5652, www.lalolasf.com

THIRSTY BEAR

Come for the wonderful array of local microbrews (Valencia Wheat = light bliss) — treated with wine-like reverence here in terms of kicky pairings with piquant escabeche (pickled vegetables), pollo al vino tinto (chicken in red wine), and bright octopus terrine. But do stay for the fabulous flamenco performances on Sunday evening, when a crowd of the city's more adventurous culinary explorers watch expertly dramatic dancers kick up their heels.

661 Howard, SF. (415) 974-0905, www.thirstybear.com

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